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AUTHOR Johnson, Dennis L.
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ABSTRACT

In the 1990s, community colleges will be faced with a real challenge and an opportunity: to become marketing-oriented institutions. Marketing is crucial to reinventing the colleges as institutions that are capable of contributing to the education of an underskilled workforce and a significant underclass--an endeavor vital to the nation's competition in a global economy. By applying the four "P's" of marketing, community colleges can begin to meet the changing needs of a high-technology society. First, colleges must realize that ultimately they are judged by the measurable benefits they produce in their learning "Product," the student. Second, the "Place," that is, the time, location, and circumstances under which learning is provided, should be designed to be convenient for the student consumers. Third, community colleges should emphasize their "Price," that is, both the real and perceived cost to a student, because the colleges deliver high value at a low cost. The fourth strategy, "Promotion," can only be utilized when the Price, Place, and Product are of high quality. Promotion will require an extensive amount of market research. Among the critical questions this research should address are: (1) Do the internal publics (i.e., faculty, staff, administration, governing boards, and students) understand, and are they committed to, the unique mission of community colleges? (2) Does the college know why students develop interest in, attend, and leave the college? and (3) Are demographic and psychographic profiles developed for major segments of both the internal and external marketplace? (MAB)

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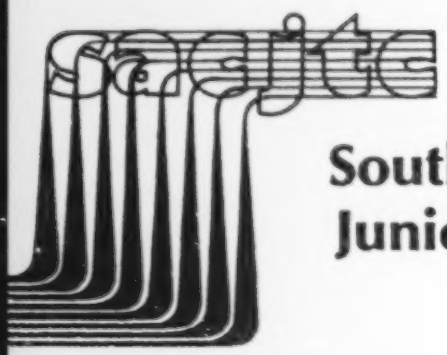

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Southern Association of Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges

Lex D. Walters, Editor

Volume 8, Number 1, May 1990

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Reinventing The Community College

Dennis L. Johnson

Nineteen-ninety, plus ten: The year 2,000 is highlighted by a groundbreaking for the 2,000th community college in the United States. As projected, it was located in Florida, and opened with an enrollment of 27,000 "prime time learners" with a mean age of 66! CLAUDE PEPPER COMMUNITY COLLEGE reflected its namesake's commitment to seniors. "Prime time learning" became a Social Security benefit for everyone beyond age 62. "Learn-a-tories" -- condominiums, the workplace, private houses, and senior housing developments became the extended campus. Students were given delivery choices ranging from one-on-one learning, to small groups, to computer based training (CBT), to videodiscs, to compact discs (CD-ROM) -- all the new technology together with lots of personal attention. Whatever was wanted and convenient became the choice of the "prime time learner." The community college of the year 2000 was "of the community, not apart from it."

HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH, and HIGH-TEACH became a reality. The computer revolution became a computer evolution. Faculty finally embraced high-technology, thus releasing them from repetitive lectures and less-than-current information in their disciplines. Students could view the material, interact, measure performance, communicate through electronic mail, use outside sources and move at a pace comfortable to each of them.

High-Tech led to High-Touch -- the ability to make employees available to learners. Faculty could meet with and counsel students in the office or meet them personally through the computer. Attrition would be reduced and retention measured -- a quantifiable way to judge quality teaching. Public contact employees would have time for much needed customer service training, and consequently they could better deal with student needs. Administrators would have reliable data regarding student satisfaction, marketplace information -- internal and external, and be able to lead by being more visible and by being closer to the marketplace.

High-Teach means that faculty measure themselves by measuring their impact, through technology, on students. When teachers are willing to measure themselves in the learning environment, good teaching becomes better teaching. Because computers can track and evaluate learning, teachers become learners. High-Teach recognizes the art and science of good teaching by measuring the success of students. Technology and teaching lead to learning -- the consumers of education, STUDENTS, benefit while the faculty member grows in value and creates value for the learner.

The year 2000 marks the end of a century and the beginning of another. The decade of the 1990's, ten short years, offers community colleges a real challenge -- and opportunity -- to really become marketing-oriented. Marketing, done properly, is no longer seen as antithetical to the mission of the community college. In fact, marketing is now seen as complementary and critical to the success of community colleges. A look at the four P's of marketing reinforces marketing's importance.

PRODUCT—What is the quality of our learning product — the student? Ultimately, community colleges are measured by what they do to benefit the student consumer, taxpayer, voter, and legislator. Are our learning products and services making a better "product" of the student? Is the student better because of the community college experience? Is the student satisfied and is there a measurable impact on his or her life? If your transfer students do as well, or better, than the native students at a four-year institution, are you communicating that success record to the media, high schools

and grade schools, students of any age and the general public? As a checklist, are you marketing services and products such as:

- Minority Success Programs
- Women's Career Center
- Day, Afternoon, or Evening Child Care Centers
- Quality of Teaching (by example)
- Success in Student Job Search
- Career Counseling
- Telephone/Computer Registration
- Safety & Lighting
- Public Transportation
- Specific Academic Programs
- Seniors Center
- Alumni Success
- Trustee Members
- Results of Research Surveys
- Humor and Fun at the College

Product quality leads to acceptance by people who are important to a college. Money and support do follow perceived and real quality. Talking about quality alone will not work. A quality product is that special learning experience between a student and a teacher. The student becomes an improved product if the experience is positive. There is a duality of benefit; teacher and student grow. Theodore Levitt of Harvard said it well: "A product is a promise, a cluster of expectations." Anything less than quality service or learning products lead to attrition. An attritioned student is one whom a community college cannot help. We fail them when they fail themselves, or we fail to help them achieve some success.

PLACE is the time, location and circumstances where learning will occur. With the new technology, computers, and a mobile life-style, we must serve them where they are, at a convenient time, with a product packaged to meet their needs. If not, they will find product or service elsewhere. Community colleges must think in terms of twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and three hundred sixty-five days a year. Just as Seven Eleven Stores are a success because of convenience, community colleges must make the adjustments. With discretionary time and discretionary dollars at a premium, potential students must learn that community colleges understand their needs. The packaging of courses and services will be critical.

PRICE is the real and perceived cost to a student. If a person has a perception that a community college is too expensive, he or she will consider other options. Since community colleges are usually the least expensive colleges per credit hour and in total cost, the low cost should be clearly and openly highlighted in the marketing effort. Obviously, value related to low cost should be a major emphasis. Additionally, financial aid, really a discounting tool, should be featured. Offering free financial aid counseling to any student lowers the "fear factor" or the "I don't qualify" belief.

PROMOTION, the fourth "P", can only be effective when Product, Place and Price are understood. When Product, Place and Price are combined with ongoing internal and external research, then effective Promotion can begin. In too many circumstances, Promotion, Public Relations and Advertising are seen as marketing. All are important, but only when they are the result of Product, Place, Price and Research. Community colleges must be intrusive into the lives of people where they are. Market research done on present and past students sets the foundation for reaching new students with like needs, motivation and interests. Just as highly competitive airlines conduct market research to gain a competitive edge and attract new markets, community colleges must do the same. Questions such as the following need to be asked and answered:

1. Do our internal publics -- faculty, staff, administration, governing boards and students -- understand the unique mission of the community college? Are they committed to the mission?

2. Are shared values understood, discussed and made an integral part of leadership/management style and operations?

3. Do external publics important to the college really understand the college and its special role? And, are they positive spokespersons for the college?

4. Are image studies completed measuring taxpayer, voter, educator, minority business leaders and other important publics' attitudes toward the college?

5. Does the college know why students develop interest in the college, attend, do not attend, leave, or what they tell others about the college?

6. Are retention and attrition studies completed each term or year? Are reasons for success and failure discussed and acted upon at every level of the college?

7. Are demographic and psychographic profiles developed for major segments of the internal and external marketplace?

8. Are research findings used in planning and decision-making? Are those affected by the decisions involved in the decision?

9. Are focus group findings, student evaluations and questionnaires used to evaluate teaching, services, departments and the college?

10. Does the college have an institutional/marketing research person or office to support faculty, staff and administration decision-making?

All of these questions are important and the answers are critical to institutional renewal. As I have stated throughout the nation, "If you are afraid of truth, don't go into marketing." One truth is clear -- community colleges are the most exciting and important segment of higher education.

The needs of the 1990's are many, and community colleges are unique in postsecondary education. In reality, we are in the business of marketing hope to those who have been told they are hopeless; those with little hope; those with great hope but in need of support. A college cannot assist an attritioned student! Thus, the responsibility of a community college is to develop a retention program, college-wide, that creates small successes which lead to better futures. If community colleges do not create success for these people, who will?

The challenge is massive. We are creating a significant underclass in the United States, and unless we develop a better work force, all will suffer. The figures are ominous:*

. . . 1,000,000 young people drop out of high schools each year.

. . . Dropout rates at many urban schools are 50% or more.

. . . 1 of every eight 17-year olds is functionally illiterate.

. . . By 1995, 14 million Americans will be unprepared for jobs that are available.

Other facts are important to future planning:**

. . . Two-thirds of working women work full time.

. . . Seven of every ten home buyers need two incomes to pay their mortgage.

. . . One-third of all marriages are remarriages for at least one partner.

. . . One-fifth of American children are poor.

. . . Immigration accounts for more than one-fourth of U.S. population growth.

. . . The Hispanic population is growing twice as fast as the black population. The Black population is growing twice as fast as the White population.

. . . One-fourth of all Americans will be Black, Hispanic or Asian by 2000.

SOURCES:
* National Alliance of Business
** American Demographics

It is clear: we cannot compete in a global economy with a poorly educated workforce and a significant underclass. " Needed : Human Capital " (*Business Week* / September 19, 1988), clearly stated that our workforce has been the difference in our domination as an economic power. In 1851, Britain had a 66% literacy rate, and the United States a 90% literacy rate. The upstart colonies had moved up to second as an economic power and Britain believed the literate workforce was the reason. In 1988, Japan's functional literacy rate was better than 95%. In America it is down to about 80%! This *Business Week* article should be required reading for every community college employee. In reality, we are losing...to ourselves.

With 250,000,000 people, we have to "Reinvent the Community College." Products have life cycles, including the steps of introduction, growth, maturity and decline. The growth of the 1960's and 1970's was a "heady" time — new colleges, new campuses, new staffs and ample funding. Whether community colleges are at the maturity or decline step can be debated. One thing is clear; the marketplace and needs have changed, and a new life cycle may be in order. Introduction and growth need to be "reinvented" at the community college, not in the buildings and campus sense, but in building futures.

How does one reinvent a community college? It begins by looking at the marketplace and its needs for the next ten years and beyond. Questions such as the following should be asked and answered.

1. Do we know the demographic projections and can we adjust to serving the changes and needs reflected in a different marketplace?
2. Is our faculty, staff and administration trained and equipped to deal with evolving learning needs? As people retire or leave, what kind of people will be needed to replace them?
3. Do we know and understand, the special needs of minorities? Where are they located? Have we created trust and a "comfort zone" for minorities? Have we made a commitment of dollars, people and time?
4. Does the business and political community see the college as a resource for change and economic development?
5. Is the college willing to change as the marketplace changes?

Perhaps another way to reinvent the community college is to look at the next ten years and approach them from the standpoint that a community college does not exist in the service area. This Zero-Based-Marketing (ZBM) approach gives creative leaders a chance to design new delivery programs and services without the baggage of an existing college. To get out of the present allows one to prepare for the future; this nation needs the minds and skills of every person. " The Wall Street Journal Reports" (*The Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 1990) opens with the following statements:

> Annual public and private spending on elementary and secondary education: $189.1 billion
> Annual spending by employers on formal and informal training of employees: $210 billion
>
> From now until the end of the century, 88% of workforce growth will come from women, blacks and people of Hispanic or Asian origin, including immigrants.
> White men, meanwhile, account for most retirees and are leaving the work force in record numbers.
>
> Percent of U.S. colleges requiring foreign-language training for B.A. degree in 1988-89: 58%. Percent in 1965-66: 89%
>
> Percent of Japanese high school graduates who have taken at least six years of English: 100%
> Percent of American high school students who have studied three years of Japanese: .02%
>
> Percent of Motorola job applicants who flunk an entry-level exam requiring seventh-to ninth-grade English and fifth-to seventh-grade math: 20 - 40%
>
> Percent of 13-year-old U.S. students using calculators in math class: 25%. Percent of 13-year-old Japanese students using calculators in math class: 3%
>
> IBM's annual training costs: $1.5 billion. Harvard University's annual operating expenses: $951.7 million

In an international study of 13-year-olds, rank of U.S. students in math proficiency: Last
Rank of South Korean students: First
In the same study, percentage of U.S. students who felt they were "good at mathematics:" 68%. Percentage of Korean students who felt they were "good at mathematics:" 23%

These statements reinforce the critical need for an aggressive, responsive, change-oriented, committed and caring community college. Community colleges should not attempt to emulate universities or four-year colleges. Serving the well-prepared person is less difficult than the daily challenges present at the community college.

Community colleges take "outsiders" and make them "insiders"...a challenging task. Teaching is different at community colleges. Content is supported by caring, and that is important. Dr. Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching stated in a commencement address:

> "An incompetent teacher is even worse than an incompetent surgeon because a surgeon can only cut up one person at a time!"

Conversely, Dennis L. Johnson says:

> "A truly competent teacher is better than a competent surgeon because a surgeon can only help one person at a time. A truly competent teacher works miracles with many, each of whom is an individual with unlimited possibilities."

Reinventing the community college must be an ongoing process. As the marketplace changes, inventive leaders create new answers. That is the genius of the community college.

The United States needs a better educated workforce, and millions need a better education. We have a choice: "Educate them or support them!"

Dennis L. Johnson is the President of JOHNSON ASSOCIATES, INC., a marketing consulting firm he founded in 1967. He resides and maintains his offices in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, (708) 790-2201.

Additional copies of this occasional paper may be obtained by writing the editor at Piedmont Technical College, P.O. Drawer 1467, Greenwood, South Carolina 29648. Copies are three dollars each, including cost of mailing. Make checks payable to SACJTC.

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